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ABSTRACT

Religion's place in the curriculum and how school administrators can avoid litigation while discharging the obligation to educate are discussed in this report. It is designed to give school policymakers guidance in arriving at informed decisions about religion's place in the curriculum. Chapter one examines the dilemma of adequately educating students who lack an understanding of religion's influence in history. Chapter two analyzes how classroom practices are based on a series of defacto policies that encourage educators to avoid explicit reference to religion. Chapter three is an examination of the religious, historical, sociological, educational, legal, and political assumptions that undergrid present curricular policies. Chapter four explores the legal basis for teaching about religion. Chapter five describes how public protest has hindered thoughtful treatment of religion in textbooks. Chapter six emphasizes that the proper role of religion in the school is the study of religion for its educational value and presents suggestions for proper inclusion of religion in schools. Chapter seven points out that commonly stated educational goals cannot be achieved without proper integration of religion into the curriculum. The concluding chapter contains a list of recommendations for ending public education's silence on religion. (SM)

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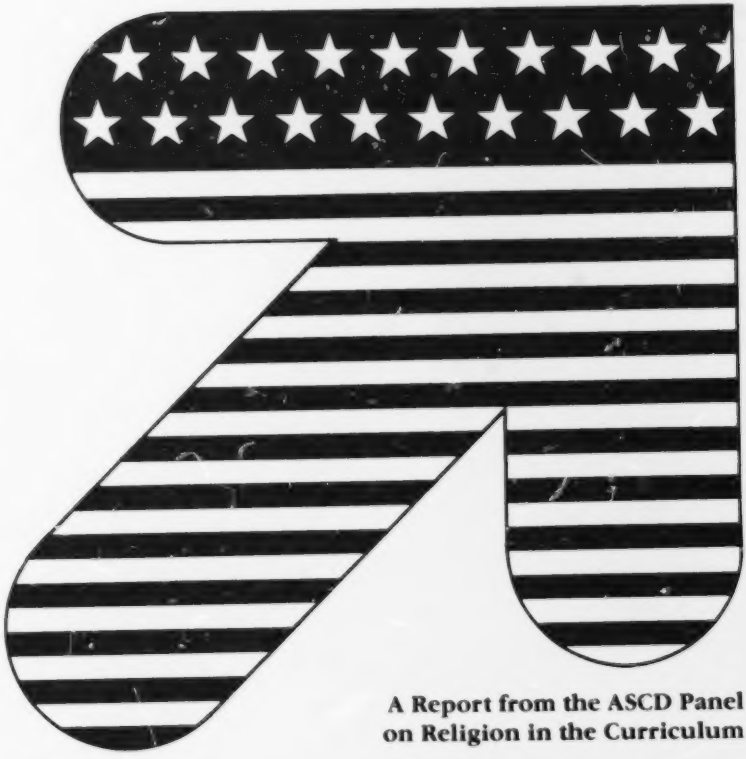

A Report from the ASCD Panel on Religion in the Curriculum

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August 1987

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
Alexandria, Virginia

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Members of the ASCD Panel on Religion in the Curriculum

O. L. Davis, Jr., Professor of Curriculum & Instruction, The University of Texas at Austin.
Edward Jenkinson, Professor of English Education, Indiana University, Bloomington.
Lee Smith, Co-Director of the World Religions Curriculum Development Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota.
Timothy Smith, Professor of History, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland.
James Squire, Senior Vice President (retired) and Executive Consultant, Silver, Burdett & Ginn, Lexington, Massachusetts.
Carol Wilson, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum & Instruction, School District 12, Adams County, Northglenn, Colorado.
Mark G. Yudof, Dean, School of Law, The University of Texas at Austin.
Diane G. Berreth (Chair), Director of Field Services, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Alexandria, Virginia.
Sally Banks Zakariya, (Project Editor), Senior Editor, *The American School Board Journal*, Alexandria, Virginia.

This report does not necessarily reflect the official positions of the organizations represented by the panel members.

Introduction

"IT WAS RELIGION THAT GAVE BIRTH TO THE ENGLISH COLONIES IN America. One must never forget that," wrote Alexis de Tocqueville in *Democracy in America*. Yet, more than a century later, the quest for religious freedom that fueled the establishment of this nation receives scant treatment at best in many of the textbooks currently in use. The texts have even less to say about the profound part religious belief has played in more recent U.S. history. Students probably won't find out from their textbooks that religious groups were a vital force in the abolitionist and temperance movements of the nineteenth century or the civil-rights movement of the twentieth.

Nor is it only texts in American history that are affected. The critical influence of religion on world history and culture is similarly slighted in texts on political science, sociology, literature, and world history. An elementary student can come away from a textbook account of the Crusades, for example, with the notion that these wars to win the Holy Land for Christendom were little more than exotic shopping expeditions. So, too, in discussions of current events, students study the situations in Northern Ireland and Lebanon or the war between Iran and Iraq without benefit of information that would help them understand the role of religion in these conflicts. Moreover, discussion of religious allusions and themes necessary for understanding many great works of literature are not found in the textbooks.

As these few examples suggest, references to religion have been all but excised from the public school curriculum. Their absence has been documented in various recent studies.[1] This filtering of religious influences—intended as such or not, that is what it amounts to—is the result, in part, of a concern that the constitutional wall separating church and

[1]The studies include:

Davis, O. L., Jr., *et al. Looking at History: A Review of Major U.S. History Textbooks*. Washington, D.C.: People for the American Way, 1986.

Haynes, Charles. "Teaching about Religious Freedom in American Secondary Schools" (unpublished study). Silver Spring, Md.: Americans United Research Foundation, 1985.

Vitz, Paul. *Censorship: Evidence of Bias in Our Children's Textbooks*. Ann Arbor, Mich.: Servant Publications, 1986.

state might be breached. It also reflects an exaggerated fear of controversy—as if blandness begets self-preservation. Despite the absence of teaching about religion in our schools—or perhaps because of it—some parents charge that school officials are scaling that wall by promoting "secular humanism" as a religion in itself. Others demand that schools shield their children from ideas that conflict with the family's religious beliefs.

These challenges, and the growing realization that schools are failing to teach the profound part religion plays in human history and culture, pose a dilemma for educators. How can schools walk the fine line between teaching about religion and unconstitutionally promoting one or more specific religions? In a pluralistic society, what is the legitimate place of religion in the curriculum? And how can educators avoid litigation while discharging their obligation to educate?

In February 1987, ASCD convened a policy panel to address these questions. The panel discussed the distinctions among civic values, religious values, and teaching about religion, and selected as its focus teaching about religion. This report examines current practices and policies and the assumptions on which they are based; explores the legal basis for teaching about religion and the response of textbook publishers to parents' and educators' concerns; and suggests guidelines for including matters of religion in the curriculum. The report is designed to give school policymakers a starting point from which to arrive at informed decisions about the place of religion in the curriculum.

1
The Flight from Controversy

THE INCREASING POLITICIZATION OF RELIGIOUS FERVOR IN THE United States has caught many administrators and teachers unprepared to face the explosive forces that now surround teaching about religion in the public schools. Because religion is so controversial a subject, many educators have opted for benign neglect in their classrooms and accepted textbooks that virtually ignore religion. The outcome has been massive ignorance of any faith beside one's own (and sometimes even of one's own)—an ignorance compounded by the scarcity of information about traditional religions in elementary and secondary school textbooks, college courses, and the mass media.

The distinction between morality and religious dogma, so painfully established and so long revered in the American system of "common" or public schools, has shattered under the hammer blows of sectarians on both the ideological right and left. Some social scientists, realizing that moral convictions are central to systems of popular faith, appear to have concluded that to teach morality is to promote the establishment of religion. Some church leaders, on the other hand, have renewed the long-standing but shallow argument that ethical behavior will disappear if their particular religious dogma is not taught to all young people.

Clearly, an emphasis on moral values has characterized American education from its inception. This emphasis reflected a Protestant moral consensus, but Deists like Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin heartily supported it. Roman Catholics from Germany, Ireland, and, later, Quebec, Italy, Poland, and Latin America found the Protestant trappings of that consensus difficult to accept. In the 1840s and 1850s, Irish and German bishops advocated forbidding the public schools to teach either faith or morals, fearing the dominant ethos would be firmly Protestant. But within decades, Catholics, who in the absence of alternatives had sent their children to such schools, heard the successors of those bishops declare that the public schools were godless because they did not teach Catholic doctrine and morality. Jews, who became numerous in many American cities by the end of the nineteenth century, objected to the Christian symbols that both Protestants and Catholics endorsed. Those objections were not blunted by the recognition that the moral principles of Christianity often were similar to their own.

Unfortunately, this confusion about moral education has contributed to the decline of curricular integrity. Whatever one's views of moral education, it is undeniable that religious events and commitments have influenced history and culture at moments of crisis. But here the textbooks have let us down. This is true across the curriculum, but examples from history are especially obvious. Students cannot fully understand the successful outcome of the long crusade against slavery (either in the United States or in the West Indies), for example, without knowing the part that Christian abolitionists played. Nor can they comprehend the vibrant black culture that sprang to life in the South following the Civil War without reference to the role of black churches. Likewise, students cannot evaluate the career of Martin Luther King, Jr., without knowing his profoundly religious convictions about racism and war—convictions that were shared not only by black Baptists and Methodists but by the white Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish members of the clergy who flocked to King's support. Regardless of their own religious convictions, young Americans need to know these facts.

And the same can be said of other historical movements: the place of the Deist faith of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison in forming the American republic, for example; the role of Protestants in the founding of common schools in Horace Mann's day; the impact of the urban revivals of the nineteenth century on the progress of other social reforms; the place of religious congregations in the communal lives of various immigrant groups; and the importance of both Christianity and Judaism in shaping the Progressive Era and the New Deal.

Not only do students need to understand the influence religion has exerted in history, but they also need to know the basic tenets of the world's major religions, most of which are represented in America's diverse student population. To be thoughtful citizens, to vote intelligently, to relate constructively to one another in schools and colleges, students need to understand as much as possible of the diverse religions of the world in which they live.

Combating Ignorance

A major obstacle to reversing the prevailing ignorance about religion is the lack of adequate instructional materials. Textbooks—especially those dealing with the social sciences, history, and literature—typically exclude almost all significant treatment of traditional religions. Students occasionally find mentions of Jews and Catholics in high school American history texts, for example, but never any discussion of Judaism or Roman Catholicism or Eastern Orthodoxy. The economic and political activity

of Mormons receives some treatment, but never Mormon religious doctrine. All the textbooks ignore Pennsylvania German churches and sects of the colonial period, as well as German and Scandinavian Lutheran immigrants who later settled in America. Fundamentalists might turn up in accounts of the Scopes trial, but they and the twentieth-century evangelicals, white and black, to whom they are related, appear nowhere else in the texts.

Nor are textbooks the only problem: Many eminently readable volumes by respected historians focus on these matters, but few high school libraries have purchased them.[1] Supplementary classroom materials on religion also only rarely find their way into teachers' hands. Moreover, many university courses in the liberal arts, social sciences, and education have for decades neglected to focus on historical or contemporary expressions of religion in American and world cultures or on the influence of religious texts in world literature. Clearly, a major overhaul of the resources for teaching and learning about religion must be high priority in primary and secondary education and in university courses taken by teacher candidates.

[1]Among the many works on religion that might enrich a high school library collection are such volumes as these. Except for the volume by Jay Dolan, all are, or recently have been, available in paperback.

Cremin, Lawrence A. *American Education: The National Experience 1783-1896*. New York: Harper and Row, 1980.

Dolan, Jay P. *The American Catholic Experience*. New York: Doubleday, 1985.

Glazer, Nathan. *American Judaism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972.

Marsden, George, ed. *Evangelicalism & Modern America*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1984.

Mathews, Donald G. *Religion in the Old South*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.

Morgan, Edmund S. *Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1965.

Reichley, A. James. *Religion in American Public Life*. Washington: Brookings Institution, 1985.

Shipps, Jan. *Mormonism, The Story of a New Religious Tradition*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985.

Smith, Timothy L. *Revivalism and Social Reform*. Nashville, 1957; reprinted, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980.

2
De Facto Policy

SCHOOL POLICIES CONCERNING RELIGION GENERALLY ADDRESS noncurricular issues, such as the observance of religious holidays. Many of these policies, which vary widely from school district to school district, were adopted in response to legal challenges to such practices as displaying religious symbols in classrooms, observing religious holidays, or performing religious music at school concerts. But policies addressing the place of religion in the curriculum are less common; in practice, decisions concerning the study of religions or of religious literature frequently are a matter of de facto, rather than explicit, policy. A brief sketch of how public schools have treated the study of the Bible in recent decades suggests the evolution of that de facto policy.

Public school courses called "The Bible" or "The Bible as Literature" were offered in the 1930s through the 1950s. These courses took two different approaches. The first presented the Bible as religion, and students studied the word of God as it was thought to be presented in the Bible. Under the second approach, which focused on the Bible as literature, students read and analyzed stories and poems from a variety of books, primarily from the Old Testament.

Most of the Bible-as-religion courses disappeared shortly after the U.S. Supreme Court's decisions on prayer and Bible reading in the schools, but some Bible-as-literature courses flourished in the 1960s and early 1970s as electives in the high school English program. Because these courses were not required, they came in for relatively little criticism. Objections arose primarily from a few members of the clergy who thought students should study the Bible primarily as a source of religious doctrine, rather than as literature.

In the late 1970s, however, elective courses began to be curtailed as the back-to-basics movement gained momentum. Separate courses in the Bible as literature either became units in regular English courses or, more likely, vanished from the curriculum altogether.

During this same period, attempts to censor school materials increased dramatically, and many educators and publishers were confused by the contradictory challenges of the protesters. On the one hand, critics (including President Ronald Reagan) denounced the courts for removing prayer and Bible reading from the public schools and criticized the

schools for not advancing certain moral precepts. On the other hand, some sociologists and spokesmen for traditional religions condemned schools and publishers alike for presenting ideas in an open-ended way that allowed students to develop their own individual moral codes. Some conservative Protestants also criticized them for referring to religions in other cultures, promoting the beliefs of "secular humanism," and—picking up an old concern—advancing the theory of evolution.

In response to these conflicting pressures and as a result of specifications from certain adoption committees, some textbook publishers removed any mention of evolution from biology texts. Similarly, because some adoption committees objected to texts that might be charged with advancing a particular religion, the publishers de-emphasized or ignored the role of religion in the founding and development of this nation. Some even edited works of literature to remove references to God or any other words or phrases that might offend anyone on religious grounds.

The overreaction trickled down to the classroom, where teachers often ignored religious references in English or history classes for fear of violating what they mistakenly thought the Supreme Court had ruled. One school librarian even asked her principal what she should do with a copy of the Bible that she found tucked away in the stacks!

Of course, what happens in one school does not occur everywhere. Just as some schools offered—and still offer—courses in the Bible as literature, some schools offered—and still offer—courses in comparative religion. Some teachers go beyond their texts to explain religion's influence in history and culture. But others ignore any mention of the subject for fear of violating the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment, and they find support for their position in textbooks that virtually ignore religion.

Obviously, not all public schools treat the study of religion or of the Bible as literature in the same way, nor should they. But the fact that no uniform policy exists is of less importance than the fact that most schools have no written policies at all concerning the study of the Bible or of religion. Instead, classroom practice often is based on a series of de facto policies, which encourage educators to avoid explicit references to religion altogether or at least to tread gently around the subject and, if it is necessary to mention religion at all, to treat all religions "objectively." These de facto policies flourish in an atmosphere of assumptions that, while commonly held, are not necessarily correct.

3
Underlying Assumptions

MANY OF THE ASSUMPTIONS THAT UNDERGIRD PRESENT POLICIES ON religion in the curriculum are incorrect, contradictory, or illogical. These assumptions about religion, about historical and social developments, about educational psychology, and about law and politics, need reexamination.

Religious Assumptions

Although religious beliefs may be recognized as valuable in both the social and political spheres, our basic law permits no religious test for citizenship or for public office. Indeed, our pluralistic society commonly holds religion to be a private matter, and many people consider it an inappropriate and potentially divisive topic of conversation except within a private group.

As a result, public schools are cautious to avoid even the possibility of invading individuals' belief systems—a caution that honors the abiding American assumption of religion as private as much as it skirts constitutional issues of church and state. Moreover, distinctions among dogmas, practices, and observances in different religions are not easily drawn. This difficulty leads many schools to back away from teaching *about* religion to escape the charge that they are teaching the dogma of a particular religion.

In addition, widespread confusion about the relationship of religion and morality makes shaping school policy more difficult. On the one hand, if moral education is held to be religious education, instruction about morality is constitutionally prohibited. (Indeed, many people find the very notion of a body of tenable moral positions inappropriate in a pluralistic society.) On the other hand, many people reject the assumption of early Americans that either individual or civic morality rests upon particular religious beliefs. Faced with the prospect of picking their way through a minefield of conflicting opinions, educators generally assert that adherence to moral precepts is essential to society and then leave it to individuals to decide, in the light of their own religious beliefs, what these precepts are.

Historical and Social Assumptions

Elements of religion as belief and practice, such as prayer and Bible reading, were present in many American public schools for generations. In our century, however, increasing secularization and pluralism made such practices unsustainable, and landmark Supreme Court decisions of the early 1960s struck them down. Nevertheless, the persistence of religious convictions, however pluralistic, requires educators to face up to the question of diverse religious beliefs in the schools.

The central purposes of public schools are intellectual and civic, however, not religious. Religious education, or teaching *of* religion, is the job of parents and religious institutions, but teaching *about* religion is a legitimate purpose of public schools. Thus, the roles of religion in society, particularly in American society, should receive renewed emphasis in schools, as should the comparative study of religions.

Some advocate religious education in the public schools on the ground that churches, synagogues, and other religious institutions cannot be expected to inculcate any religions but their own. Moreover, many children and youth today are not nourished by strong families or religious institutions. Although this fact might be lamentable, it is no justification for the schools to invade the province of religious faith.

Another assumption that shapes the schools' treatment of religion is the sentiment that religion is "the dead hand of the past," at best unimportant in modern life and at worst a destructive influence. According to this notion, inattention to religion does not distort history when viewed from a "modern" perspective. Nothing could be further from the truth, yet this sentiment appears to influence teaching. Rather than teach about religion and its roles in society, some educators abandon the field as an intellectual wasteland, leaving capricious and uninformed judgment to take the place of reasoned understanding.

Psychological and Educational Assumptions

Some of the assumptions that fall into this category are simply mistaken. For example, children and youth are not too immature to study about religion, just as they are not too immature to study the intellectual wonders of mathematics, science, history, and literature. Immaturity is a convenient, if shabby, excuse for shielding children from intellectual confrontations with ideas.

Another questionable assumption is that young people will receive religious education at home or at church, temple, or synagogue. Of course, they might—but rarely about any faith save their own.

Separating the teaching *of* beliefs from teaching *about* beliefs often

means walking a razor's edge. Some people contend, for example, that teaching about Protestantism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Catholicism, or Judaism gives favored status to those religions. They also say textbooks that explain some religions but not all of them tend to establish the dominant ones. This largely unexamined claim stifles good-faith attempts by teachers and publishers to include religion appropriately in the curriculum. Nevertheless, the difficulty of separating teaching religion to instill belief from teaching about religion in a good-faith attempt to educate the young is an insufficient ground for avoiding the necessary task.

Another common assumption is that matters of religion are simply too hot to handle in public schools. Community dissension, threats of litigation, even the loss of professional jobs—all these are deeply etched in educators' memories. This reality must not be cavalierly dismissed. Yet almost any classroom topic has the potential of outraging someone's sensitivity, trespassing on someone's wish to remain ignorant, or challenging someone's beliefs. This risk is routinely ignored in most school offerings—except those topics related to religion. Teaching the theory of evolution is a conspicuous example, but there are others. Educators must reexamine the assumption that any particular area of knowledge is too risky for the classroom. This assumption is subversive to the purpose of schooling and threatening to the growth of the intellect.

A companion assumption holds that teachers are uncomfortable dealing with the subject of religion. To the extent that this is true, it might be because they feel threatened; remove the threat, and teachers might be more inclined to engage their students in the study of religion and its roles in society. Teachers want to do the best job they can, and many realize they need to know more about the different religions in order to handle the subject without putting themselves on the razor's edge. This assumption, in short, is only partially valid.

Current administrative procedures are not adequate to deal with the complexities of the problem. Simply to label religious matters "controversial" is too limiting; assuming there is "one best way" to treat such matters is too rigid and, commonly, simply wrongheaded. "Opt-out" plans, which allow students to absent themselves from classroom discussions of topics they and their parents find offensive, may defuse inflamed sentiment on such sensitive issues as drug or sex education. But when opting out reaches core curriculum areas, such as reading—as was mandated in the mischievous judicial decision in *Mozert v. Hawkins County* [Tennessee] *Public Schools*—the practice invites educational anarchy and the disintegration of common schooling in America. Deliberations about school policies and procedures must seek an agenda for

invention so that the schools' treatment of religion in the curriculum may rest on sounder assumptions.

Legal and Political Assumptions

Not to establish religion is a requirement of our Constitution. Yet we cannot be truly free, in Jeffersonian terms, unless we also are educated. Teaching *about* religion is one element of the public schools'—and society's—crusade against ignorance. Unfortunately, many fail to grasp this distinction and yield to an abiding fear of litigation.

It is no wonder textbook publishers and curriculum committees avoid topics they believe might be the target of legal challenges. Neither teachers nor publishers can be expected to offer themselves as civic sacrifices. Americans who want good schools must realize that political activity is necessary to support them. The assumption that education is "above" politics was always a contrivance; it has become a liability.

As Henry Steele Commager noted some years ago, America's public schools have kept this nation free. Even in the face of political attacks and enraged rhetoric, the fact remains that our schools are one of this country's greatest strengths. But good schools can become better; appropriate attention to the varied roles of religions constitutes one avenue to school improvement. For guidance along the way, educators should look to the political process, to common sense (even when uncommonly applied), and to constitutional law.

4

What the Courts Say

JUSTICE HOLMES ONCE REMARKED THAT GREAT CASES SOMETIMES exert "a kind of hydraulic pressure which makes what previously was clear seem doubtful."[1] For almost 25 years, the law of the land, as articulated in the school prayer cases, has been that ritual prayer and Bible reading in the public schools violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. More recently, in *Wallace* v. *Jaffree* and *Edwards* v. *Aguillard*, the Supreme Court held unconstitutional laws requiring moments of silence and the teaching of alternative theories of the origin of man in public schools because their purpose was to promote prayer and religious doctrine.[2] Such cases have occasioned a great national debate, which focuses on the historical meaning of the Establishment Clause, the role of the Supreme Court, and the wisdom and need for a constitutional amendment to allow voluntary prayer in public schools.

The metaphor of the wall of separation between church and state is so alluring, the hydraulic pressure of Establishment Clause litigation so powerful, and the compulsion to embrace simplistic solutions so irresistible, that many people appear convinced that all historical and other contextual references to religion must be eradicated from public education. They draw no distinction between the accurate portrayal of the roles of different religions in history, culture, politics, music, literature, and other fields and a quite different effort to shape public school students into ideological clones who share the same dominant religious perspectives and values. But "purification" of public education from all nonsecular influences is not the law of the land, nor has it ever been.

Perhaps it is useful to begin with the realization that public schools are not value-neutral, that they do more than simply inculcate skills. As Chief Justice Burger put the point in *Bethel School District* v. *Fraser* in 1986, an important objective of public education is the "inculcation of fundamental values necessary to the maintenance of a democratic polit-

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[1]*Northern Securities Co.* v. *United States*, 193 U.S. 197, 401 (1904).
United States, 193 U.S. 197, 401 (1904).

[2]*Wallace* v. *Jaffree*, 472 U.S. 38 (1985); *Edwards* v. *Aguillard*, 55 L.W. 4860 (No. 85-1513) (U.S. June 19, 1987).

ical system."[3] That being the case, the limits on religious socialization are, in some sense, special. Those limits typically are articulated in terms of a three-part test set forth by the Supreme Court in the 1971 case of *Lemon* v. *Kurtzman*:

1. Does the action of the government (or of its agent, the public school) have a secular or nonsecular purpose?
2. Is the primary effect of the action to advance religion?
3. Does it create an excessive entanglement between religion and government?[4]

As a constitutional matter and as a policy matter, Americans might be less concerned about indoctrination in political, cultural, and historical values than they are about indoctrination to religious norms. But it would not be accurate to say that religion is the only source of concern. Consider, for example, what Justice Brennan had to say in a case about removing books from a school library:

> If [school authorities] intended by their removal decision to deny [students] access to ideas with which [they] disagreed, and if this intent was the decisive factor in [the] decision, then [the school authorities] have exercised their discretion in violation of the Constitution. To permit such intentions to control official actions would be to encourage [an] . . . officially prescribed orthodoxy . . .[5]

Or consider the words of Justice Blackmun in the same case: "Our precedents command the conclusion that the State may not act to deny access to an idea simply because state officials disapprove of that idea for partisan or political reasons."[6]

Thus there is a delicate balance—an Archimedean point, as one writer described it—between permissible and impermissible socialization, between the passing on of the cultural heritage of a diverse people and the quest for critical thinking and imagination.[7]

Where does all this leave us in terms of the place of religion in public schools? First, educators and lawyers should recognize the constitutional distinction between teaching about religion or about the roles of different religions and seeking to inculcate religious ideas and practices. Justice Clark said as much for the majority in *Abington School District* v. *Schempp*, the most famous of the school prayer cases:

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[3]*Bethel School District* v. *Fraser*, 106 S.Ct. 3159 (1986).

[4]*Lemon* v. *Kurtzman*, 403 U.S. 602 (1971).

[5]*Board of Education* v. *Pico*, 457 U.S. 853, 868 (1982) (plurality opinion).

[6]Id. at 878-79 (concurring opinion).

[7]Yudof, Mark G. "Library Book Selection and the Public Schools: The Quest for the Archimedean Point." *Indiana Law Journal* 59 (1984): 527-64.

> [I]t might well be said that one's education is not complete without a study of comparative religion or the history of religion and its relationship to the advancement of civilization. It certainly may be said that the Bible is worthy of study for its literary and historic qualities. Nothing we have said here indicates that such study of the Bible or of religion, when presented objectively as part of a secular program of education, may not be effected consistently with the First Amendment.[8]

But is it possible for religions to be "presented objectively" in public school classrooms? This brings us to our second point: Educators should ask themselves whether their focus on religion is an effort to educate or whether they are bent on inculcating religious values. The job of educators is to educate, not to instill religious devotion. As Justice Clark notes, a person cannot be fully educated without understanding the role of religion in history, culture, and politics. And the law, constitutional or otherwise, is no impediment to the realization of this aim.

[8]*Abington School District* v. *Schempp*, 374 U.S. 203 (1963).

5

How Protests and Market Pressures Affect Textbooks

THE LAW MAY BE NO IMPEDIMENT TO RELIGION IN THE CURRICULUM, but public protest—some of it based on misinterpretation of the law, some on narrow secular or sectarian interests—has hindered thoughtful treatment of religion in textbooks. Increasingly in the 1970s, public objections to the inclusion of certain religious facts or interpretations in instructional materials led textbook adoption committees to reject specific books.[1] Publishers responded by eliminating stories about religions and omitting references to God or to specific faiths and religious celebrations—even facts about the religious diversity of this country. Textbook selection criteria adopted by some states and large cities called for a rigorous exclusion of references to religion, rather than for an awareness of the nation's religious pluralism.

As mentioned earlier, among the first to go was teaching the Bible as literature—long a staple in elementary school readers and high school literature programs. Now, textbooks offer little or no help in understanding the many Biblical allusions that enrich English and American literature. The name of God and names of other deities and religious figures could not appear in textbooks used in the public schools of some states; thus disappeared the poetry of the Psalms, as well as literary selections referring to great religious figures of the world—to Moses, Jesus, Mohammed or Confucius, for example.

Stories and classroom activities concerning religious holidays also were suspect—and were specifically excluded in some state textbook selection criteria. Today's textbooks contain few, if any, references to Christmas and Easter, or even to Thanksgiving, St. Patrick's Day, or Columbus Day, to say nothing of Jewish holidays or those of other religions. And the suggested topics of discussion in current texts seldom include moral or ethical questions, even those that appear in literary selections. Even fairy tales have suffered: References to supernatural or

[1]See Jenkinson, Edward B. *Censors in the Classroom: The Mindbenders*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1979; and Committee on Freedom to Read. *Limiting the Students' Right to Read*. Washington, D.C.: 1981.

imaginary beings such as gnomes, elves, witches, goblins, and fairies are the targets of protest by some people who believe such beings have religious implications. As a result, selections from traditional children's literature dealing with such figures, which once appeared frequently in textbooks, have all but disappeared.

Over the past decades, the combined assault of many isolated objectors has had a cumulative effect. State adoption guidelines might call for excluding certain references to religion, but they seldom specify what information about religion—if any—should be included in textbooks. And in the absence of articulated policies, textbook publishers, editors, and writers tend to respond with safely acceptable content.

In biology textbooks, for example, the conflict over teaching evolution or creation theory has taken a severe toll. When possible, many texts avoid all reference to the creation of the earth or the evolution of man; as a result, some instructional materials overemphasize physical science at the expense of life science. Accounts of anthropologists unearthing fossils are carefully edited to avoid any possibly objectionable suggestions about the origin of man. And some of the texts that do present Darwin's views of evolution counter their presentations by summarizing opposing Biblical views.

Given the significance of religion and religious movements in the political and cultural history of the world, their virtual absence from today's social studies and history textbooks is particularly reprehensible. For example, references to the cultural history and contribution of the Jewish people seldom appear in the texts, nor do references to their persecution since early medieval times. Not until the Associated Jewish Councils published a study of history textbooks in the mid-70s did many people realize that references to the Holocaust had virtually disappeared from school texts.[2] Now, discussions of the Holocaust are beginning to reappear in schoolbooks because some adoption committees are insisting on it.

Nevertheless, "the treatment of religion as a force in U.S. history continues to receive short shrift."[3] That is the conclusion of a 1986 study of 31 eighth- and tenth-grade American history textbooks submitted for adoption in Texas—the nation's largest adoption state. School histories

[2]Kane, Michael. *Minorities in Textbooks: A Study of Their Treatment in Social Studies Texts*. Chicago: Quadrangle Books in Cooperation with The Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, 1970. Also, Glenn S. Pate. *Treatment of the Holocaust in U.S. History Textbooks*. Anti-Defamation League of New York, 1970.

[3]David, O. L., Jr., et al. *Looking at History: A Review of Major U.S. History Textbooks*. Washington, D.C.: People for the American Way, 1986.

tend to treat religion only by brief or simplistic references, according to this study. Apparently, some people equate any treatment of religion in history texts with advocacy of specific religious ideas, and publishers therefore avoid it.

The objectors appear to have won: Content that seeks to advance knowledge and understanding about religions has been virtually excised. Today's schoolbooks no longer inform young people about religion in the world. One looks in vain for adoption guidelines that call specifically for textbook treatment of religion. Only when educators and parents demand critical instruction about the role of religion in world culture will such passages reappear in reading, literature, science, social studies, and history books.

6
Religion in the Curriculum

THE SCHOOLS' SILENCE ON RELIGION RESULTS IN FAILURE TO TELL students the whole story of human civilization. Because we fail to engage students in discussions of the First Amendment and its attendant Supreme Court decisions, to give one example, we fail to instill in them the responsibility of our heritage of religious freedom and pluralism. But ironically, although the explicit curriculum might be silent on religion, a second look at American public schools suggests that the subject is more pervasive than casual observation discerns.

The Unstated Curriculum

Certain religious assumptions and practices are subtly fostered in most public schools. This hidden curriculum is apparent in the school calendar, which generally follows the Christian liturgical calendar by tying vacations to Christmas and Easter observances. Students of other faiths often must mark their religious observances at the expense of their schooling. Most schools, for example, schedule major athletic events for Friday evenings, the most sacred hours of the Jewish week, thereby forcing Jewish students to choose between sports and religious observance. Nor does it help to combine Hanukkah observances with Christmas events (as many schools do), for the two holidays are not parallel.

The unstated curriculum is especially blatant in the area of choral music, which typically conveys Christian belief and worship. Such music can be offensive not only to students from outside the Christian tradition, but also to those within it who regard the music as too sacred for the secular setting of the public school. A host of other school activities—such as seasonal decorations, gift exchanges, parties, and caroling—also can be inappropriate in a pluralistic society. Thus, while schools seem to be sanitized and devoid of teaching about religion, deference to certain aspects of faith intrudes into the classroom through such practices as these.

Including Religion in the Curriculum

The proper role of religion in the school is the study of religion for its educational value. The task is to teach about religions and their impact in history, literature, art, music, and morality. It seems natural that the

art curriculum, for example, must pay attention to the impact of Christianity on the work of Michelangelo, just as a history class focusing on the colonization of America must pay attention to the religious upheaval in sixteenth-century Europe that fueled that colonization.

Moreover, the impact of religion on the laws, values, and morals of the American people should be analyzed in social studies classes. World history courses should deal with such topics as the rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire, the Crusades, the Medieval Church, the Reformation, and the treatment of Jews and Muslims in the Spanish Inquisition. Literature students should read not only parts of the Bible but also passages from the Koran, the Gita, the Talmud, and other sacred writings for their literary, historical, and moral qualities. In addition, the creation stories of many societies could well be the subject of cross-cultural study. Finally, although the selections at choral performances should be chosen with an eye to the religious sensitivities of all students, to ignore the contributions of religious composers in music classes would be dishonest.

Clearly, religious content can naturally and appropriately be included in several existing subject matter areas, but it should be included because of its educational, not its sacred, value. In addition, it is entirely appropriate for public schools to offer elective courses in world religions or religious literature or to include religiously sensitive issues in courses on contemporary social problems or family living.

Suggestions for Schools

Including religion in the curriculum for its educational value requires informed, honest, and sensitive teachers. It also requires the cooperation of administrators, students, parents, and religious and community leaders with those teachers. The following suggestions can help schools get started:

1. Teachers, administrators, and members of the community must be committed to the concept of a pluralistic and democratic society that accepts diversity of religious belief and practice as the norm.
2. Teachers must understand that although religion is a sensitive issue, it is not too hot for them to handle in an informed, descriptive, and impartial way.
3. All educators must be committed to keeping individual religious beliefs and practices inviolate. Children's religious beliefs are nurtured by their families and religious institutions, not by the public schools, and schools must respect those beliefs.
4. Teachers and administrators must be open and honest with each

other—and with parents and religious leaders—concerning what, where, and when the school teaches about religion.

5. Teachers need to be objectively informed about different religions and how they function in the lives of their adherents. They need to be skilled and respectful in helping students identify the functions of religion. They need to help students understand that the ideals of religion direct people toward worthy goals. Finally, they need to help students learn that religions have been both a force for conserving culture and a motivation for changing it.

6. Although teachers must play the major role in including religion in the curriculum, they will have little success without the support of colleagues, administrators, parents (at least, the great majority of them), and community and religious leaders.

7. Teaching about religion requires textbooks and other instructional materials that are accurate, objective, honest, fair, and interesting. Educators and members of the public must push for the creation of well-researched print and audiovisual materials.

8. School systems and universities (particularly schools of education) should work together to provide both preservice and inservice programs that help teachers develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and confidence they need for the effective inclusion of religion in the curriculum.

9. On a broader scale, a massive research and development effort is necessary in order to produce effective curriculum models to aid teachers, school systems, and teacher educators. This might well be a national effort in order to avoid multiple reinventions of the wheel.

10. Finally, educators must exert extreme care to avoid assuming the role of the family and the religious institution in youngsters' religious, spiritual, and moral education and development. The teacher's chief task in teaching about religion is to help students better understand faiths other than their own and the roles of religions in the life of their nation and that of other cultures.

7

Religion in the Context of School Goals

THE ISSUE OF RELIGION IN THE CURRICULUM SHOULD BE CONSIDERED within the larger context of what we expect education to accomplish. In local school systems and individual schools, these tacit expectations often take the form of stated goals. Questions deriving from these goals direct what we do in schools and help us understand why we do it. Although goal statements vary widely, John Goodlad and his colleagues have found many commonalities among them.[1] Three of the goals listed by Goodlad, and guiding questions that might be derived from them, are as follows:

1. *Enculturation*. Under this rubric, the schools' purpose is to develop an understanding of the ways in which the heritage and traditions of the past influence the present directions and values of society. A question deriving from this goal statement might run along these lines: What experiences can we provide students that will promote their understanding of how the past continues to influence the present? For example, how did the religious beliefs of early immigrants to the United States influence the formation and persistence of solidarity among modern ethnic groups?

2. *Interpersonal relations*. The schools' role here is to develop a knowledge of diverse values and their influence on individuals and society. This statement leads to such a question as: How can we help students learn about diverse value systems and their influence on individuals and society?

3. *Citizenship*. Here, a goal is to develop an attitude of inquiry in order to examine social values. Concerning this goal, educators might ask: What classroom experiences will promote inquiry into such values as racial tolerance, civic honesty, regard for law, and opposition to cruelty or violence?

These questions lead to another inescapable one: How can we respond to any of these goal statements without teaching about religion? By basing their inquiry on statements of purpose in this way, educators

[1]Goodlad, John. *What Schools Are For*. Bloomington, Ind.: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, 1979, pp. 48-50.

have a means by which to exercise their professional judgment responsibly. Teachers, administrators, and citizens should be involved in such inquiry and in decisions arising from it.

Furthermore, these goal statements and the questions that derive from them have implications not only for curriculum and teacher preparation (as we have seen in previous sections), but also for instructional materials. Textbooks and other classroom materials must be responsive to the same reasoning. Publishers must ask themselves, "How does this material help students develop insight into the shaping values of their civilization? What information does it provide about opposing value systems? How does it demonstrate the enduring influence of religion in society?"

Fostering Democracy

Another goal adopted by most states and local school systems asserts that public schools should develop a commitment to the values of liberty—of government by the consent of the governed, representative democracy, and responsibility for the welfare of all.[2] Because schools are charged with developing commitment to democratic ideals, we must ask ourselves how our dealings with our communities exemplify the pursuit of this goal.

The question is especially pertinent with regard to religion in the curriculum. Do we respond to the vocal few, or do we make deliberate efforts to base teaching about religion broadly on the beliefs of the pluralistic many? Is the near exclusion of religion in the curriculum an appropriate response to controversies that arise from religious diversity? Does this response reflect the needs of the community? Does it advance us toward our goals? Rewarding special-interest groups by responding to narrow demands flies in the face of democratic principles. When textbook publishers acquiesce to such demands, whether from secular or religious groups, and when school people accept the results, students are deprived of balanced perspectives.

Alternatives can be found in the marketplace. States and local school systems that make major textbook purchases can wield that purchasing power to encourage a more coherent and balanced treatment of religion in instructional materials. Once textbook selection groups require fair and accurate treatment of religion in the textbooks they purchase, publishers will respond affirmatively.

In addition, schools can broaden their base of influence in the

[2]Ibid.

community through the use of advisory bodies and seminars that include representatives of both religious and nonreligious groups. These forums can be devoted to single topics—religion in the curriculum, for example—or they can be study groups charged with the broader task of exploring the common curriculum. Either way, their contribution to the dialogue will help schools take into account the needs of a diverse population. Moreover, group members themselves will become better informed about what the schools are doing, and why, and will be able to serve as informed ambassadors to the community. Finally, these broadly representative groups might lessen the power of special-interest groups to determine curriculum.

Common Learnings

The mere presence of goals for schooling such as the ones we have discussed implies the existence of common learnings that are expected of all students. Understanding religions and their roles in human civilization is an integral part of that common body of knowledge, and for that reason, state departments of education and local schools should address the issue of adequate, balanced treatment of religion in the context of a core curriculum.

But common learnings are threatened when students are allowed to opt out of the study of certain topics. School systems that have adopted opt-out policies should review these policies and exercise them with care. Students who are allowed to opt out of all discussions of religious diversity—as, for example, discussions of the religious beliefs of recent immigrants from Southeast Asia and the Middle East—will be handicapped in their functioning as citizens of a pluralistic and democratic society. Opting out should be allowed only when the material or content of instruction significantly or substantially assaults an individual's religious beliefs. When that is the case, the material should be reexamined for actual bias. Certainly, opting out should not be the automatic response to material that is simply an irritant. To avoid rigidity in rule making, we encourage a case-by-case examination of requests for opting out.

Developing Understanding

Since Horace Mann's day, most educators have believed that a democracy depends on the education and enlightenment of its citizens. And as we have illustrated in our few examples, many school goals foster the effective functioning of democracy. As educators, we must be knowledgeable about these and other goals of education, and we must

continually ask ourselves how these goals are reflected in what we do in schools. When it comes to religion in the curriculum, we must avoid not only misinformation but the lack of information. We must realize that there is nothing unconstitutional in teaching about religion; in fact, to shut religion out of the curriculum altogether is to fail in carrying out an important function of schooling.

Professional organizations such as ASCD, working unilaterally and in conjunction with other education groups, can serve a useful role by providing clear and accurate information on various facets of this issue, including information about personal liability and court decisions that affect curriculum. Such information will reassure teachers and administrators who are vulnerable to challenges from special-interest groups.

On a broader scale, ASCD and other education groups must educate the community about the need to include religion in the curriculum and encourage common understandings about the purpose and content of schooling. Through intensive discussions with educators, religious leaders and representatives of other sectors of the community can understand school programs in general and teaching about religion in particular. At the same time, school people will gain access to a valuable community resource. In accepting the religious diversity of our own communities and our nation, we will be a step closer to reflecting that diversity in the curriculum and honoring the basic principles of our democracy.

8
Recommendations

CLEARLY, DECISIVE ACTION IS NEEDED TO END THE CURRENT CURRICular silence on religion. We have discussed reasons for this silence (many of them misguided), and we have discussed some of its effects (chief among them ignorance and distortion). Our recommendations for ending the silence are embedded throughout the text of this report, but some bear reiterating briefly here:

1. Local decision making on the role of religion in the curriculum should be exercised within the context of religious diversity at the local, state, national, and international levels.

2. Religious professionals and other community leaders should contribute, along with educators, to discussions of the role of religion in the curriculum, but the results of these deliberations should not be allowed to be shaped by particular ideological views.

3. Educators at all levels should be committed to the concept of a pluralistic and democratic society that accepts diversity of religious belief and practice as the norm.

4. State departments of education should address the issue of fair and factual treatment of religion in the curriculum by all local education agencies.

5. Textbook selection committees at the state, district, and local school levels should require such treatment of religion in all curricular materials. To aid these committees in their selections, education agencies and professional associations like ASCD should conduct staff development sessions on religion in the curriculum and issue specific guidelines concerning the treatment of religion in textbooks.

6. Publishers should revise textbooks and other instructional materials to provide adequate treatment of diverse religions and their roles in American and world culture and to include appropriate religious and moral themes in literary and art history anthologies.

7. A major research and development effort should be undertaken to develop new curricular materials and instructional designs for teaching about religion within the various subject areas. Scholars and educators should work together to identify significant ideas, events, people, and literature to be considered for inclusion in the curriculum.

8. Teacher educators, both preservice and inservice, should ensure

that teachers acquire not only the substantive knowledge required to teach about religion in society but also the attitudes and understanding necessary to treat the subject with sensitivity in the classroom.

9. Teachers, administrators, and members of the public should be aware of the impact of court decisions on the curriculum and should recognize that teaching about religion is not unconstitutional.

10. Teachers and administrators should analyze both the hidden and the explicit curriculums regularly to ensure sensitive concern for teaching about religion in society and for the faiths of individual students.

11. Educators should study federal court decisions regarding opting-out before developing their own policies, which should be applied strictly on a case-by-case basis. The option should be limited to those cases in which the material or content of instruction can be shown to significantly or substantially assault an individual's religious beliefs.

12. Local educators and their national organizations, including ASCD, should explore ways to foster public support for the teaching of rigorous, intellectually demanding accounts of religion in society, particularly in American society.

13. ASCD and other national education groups should aid educators in their deliberations on this matter by providing clear and accurate information on relevant court decisions, on curriculum development, on state and local textbook adoption criteria, and on policy issues affecting the role of religion in the curriculum (with representative policy statements).

These recommendations, and the report that precedes them, in no way advocate the teaching of religious belief or the sponsorship of religious practice in the public schools. To do so would be to trample what Charles Haynes has called "humanity's boldest and most successful experiment in religious freedom."[1] But to understand America's bold experiment—and to understand the driving force of many historical and cultural movements worldwide—requires an understanding of the role religion has played, and continues to play, in human civilization.[2]

[1]Haynes, Charles C. *Religious Freedom in America: A Teacher's Guide*. Silver Spring, Md.: Americans United Research Foundation, 1986.

[2]Mead, Sidney. *The Lively Experiment*, New York: Harper and Row, 1963.

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
125 N. West Street, Alexandria, VA 22314-2798